

## Opening Address Senate President Pro Tem Peter Kinder

January 9, 2002

Lt. Gov. Maxwell, fellow Senators, distinguished guests, and special friends, ladies and gentlemen. Isn't it great to be back up here?

In my reading last year, I ran across a wonderful line from Albert Einstein. Quoting that great man:

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."

Surely upon entering this familiar old Senate chamber, we must all stand in awe at the beauty and majesty that surrounds us. This historic chamber, featuring these magnificent columns with their echoes of our Greco-Roman heritage, was before the most recent renovation already one of the grand legislative chambers in the world. Now it takes its place as incontestably among the most beautiful. In this magnificent renovation, the best of the art and science of which Einstein took note have combined to prepare this place for us to transact the people's business.

Sir Isaac Newton remarked that if he were able to see great distances, it is because, he noted, "I stand on the shoulders of giants." So too, today, it is we, all of us as temporary custodians of these positions of public trust, who stand on the shoulders of giants. The giants are our forebearers, who built this magnificent state Capitol, joined by the people of Missouri today who, speaking through their elected representatives some four years and more ago, voted for a multi-year Capitol renovation. To all these, it seems to me, we, you and I, owe a debt of gratitude and a salute, and a pledge to them that the work we are about here and now will be worthy of all they have bequeathed to us.

Those of us who were here when the great Senator, Emory Melton departed, after, I believe, six terms, 24 years here, just five and a half years ago, will recall his valedictory address in this chamber. Now, for myself, I was certain that Emory, who was as respected as any Senator who ever served, would offer priceless pearls of wisdom for us. I listened intently, Emory offered us two pieces of advice, you will recall. Read the bills, and stay in your seat. I have a theory. My guess, and we're going to test this theory over the next four and a half months, is that the astounding beauty of the aesthetics in this chamber will encourage more, as Emory counseled, to remain in our seats.

Now, one of my favorite philosophers is the native St. Louisan, Yogi Berra. Once, Yogi was asked his reaction to the astonishing news that a Jew had become Lord-Mayor of Dublin. Yogi's reply?

"Only in America."

Only in America, it seems, could the events of the last year and more have unfolded. After a 53-year period of unbroken one-party control of the Missouri Senate, special elections a year ago produced what once seemed unthinkable. A Republican Party that during the 1930s had seated only three members out of 34, and as recently as the 1960s seated only seven members, held a majority in the Missouri Senate. A slim majority, at 18-16, to be sure, but nonetheless a majority. This followed an historic period from the November, 2000 election to the January 24 special-election in which the two party caucuses, regarding each other rather like two scorpions in the bottle, nonetheless negotiated an historic power-sharing agreement between the senator from Clay and me as "co-Pro Tems." This was made manifest to all the

world as he and I shared the Pro Tem's constitutional duties on the ceremonial occasion at the inaugural of the governor and the other constitutional officers.

Again I say, "Only in America", and in this specific case, "Only in Missouri," where we were doing peacefully the kind of transfer of power that in other countries is accomplished only by force of arms and bloodshed. It was said of the power-sharing agreement, with some justification, that it was a model for the nation and even for the federal Senate, as well. In other states it had taken five days and longer to elect Senate officers, in the case of a tie; in Missouri, we did it in a few minutes, because of the responsible and grown-up approach we brought to this challenge.

Our first year, being a human-led enterprise, was not without the mistakes and missteps attendant on all human endeavor. If I may return to Yogi for just a moment, he once informed his listeners that his team would win "if we can capitalize on our mistakes."

It is with Yogi's sense of good humor and candor that I freely acknowledge my own mistakes and manifest shortcomings. I ask your good will and indulgence as we attempt to carry off something no member of my party has done since 1948, and pledge to return the same to all who offer it to me.

Now, as I move toward the conclusion of these remarks a look back on the work product of the last year is in order, if only to remind ourselves of the sessions we produced in the year just concluded. As the year 2001 began, among the extraordinary circumstances I have just recounted, predictions of little accomplishment were the order of the day. Most arm-chair observers, and more than a few of our own members, seemed certain that the split-party control of the House and Senate would doom any chance for a good session. For myself, I was never of this opinion, but it was as common as blackberries in July.

As an old Democratic presidential nominee, Al Smith, once said, "Let's look at the record."

The record reflects that on the night we adjourned sine die, May the 18th, the governor put out a press release claiming victory on 15 out of 18 legislative priorities. These included the remarkable passage of congressional redistricting - - passage few would have bet on just days before. Indeed, we are probably the only split-party legislature in America that passed a congressional redistricting map last year. Inside this agreement there was plenty for partisans of both sides to hate - - which may, if you think about it, be the test of a decent compromise in fulfilling what is, after all, our constitutional mandate. It stands as the remarkable and historic achievement that it is, and so requires no further embellishment from me or anyone else.

Then, following a session that saw passage of 15 out of 18 priorities, the governor called us into extraordinary session in September, specifying three subjects to be addressed. We senators convened early, well before the House came in, we stayed late and in eight days passed all three items the governor asked us to address and went home. He promptly signed all three.

This fall we completed a hiring process for vacancies in the staff of Senate Research, all but one of them owing to voluntary departure. We set up a screening panel headed by Marty Drewel and Joan Gummels, late of Senate Research, who recently left to become chief aide to the minority leader. Each will testify to three things, I believe: 1) that this speaker never involved himself in the process; 2) that no applicant was ever asked questions as to his or her politics; and 3) of most importance, that we were able to pick five candidates from the strongest pool of applicants our folks had ever seen.

All these lists I commend to you not to boast, still less to claim all these accomplishments as my own, for they belong to us all, but to make this overriding point: This record demonstrates beyond any contest that

this Missouri Senate will work together with the governor and the speaker, across party lines, for the benefit of all Missourians, whenever we can achieve common ground.

It is equally important, however, to make this point as well: Where devotion to principle and constitutional government demand it, we will oppose any and all comers, including the governor, with equal vigor. The undisputed facts will show this to be true, as well.

As we convene today, we are well aware that we have present 32 of our full complement of 34 senators, with one vacancy to be filled at a special election next month. Sadly, some months ago, Senator Paula Carter died, after an extended battle with cancer. In attendance that morning at her funeral, I noticed, was more than half of the Senate at that funeral service, and still others I know had been present at the visitation the previous evening. I would, again, on behalf of all Senators, extend our heartfelt condolences to the friends, and to her family who survive.

We are also without, today, your Senate Minority Leader, the Senator from Clay. The Senator from Clay is recovering from surgery last Friday. I am told he is at home doing well, and expected to be with us very soon. We will all remember the Senator from Clay, his wife Jane, and his family in our hearts, and in our prayers.

And so, fortified by our strength of individual conviction and by our mutual respect and confidence, and by the rest we have earned since last we met in the cramped confines of a basement House hearing room, while this renovation proceeded, let us go forth to finish the work we are in. To air our differences, to be guided by the timeless truths etched into our walls, and not least, never to lose respect for each other as our sharply differing views clash inside this chamber. If we are true to these, then when we leave in May, of us it can be said that we did not betray the heritage bequeathed to you and me, and to all Missourians, despite our differences, Americans, one and all.